

From Public City to “Philanthropolis”: The Making of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail

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The Cultural Trail was brought to life by the Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), a local philanthropy, with the city acting mainly as a consultant. Beginning in 1999, as a way to highlight different sections of the city, six cultural districts were established and the Indianapolis Cultural Trail emerged as a biking and pedestrian path to link these communities. The Central Indiana Community Foundation provided the primary impetus for the Cultural Trail. The route and design standards were driven by CICF with city staff members participating in the planning process primarily as invited guests, rather than as the main drivers of the project. Since the establishment of the Cultural Trail, city officials and local businesses have raised questions as to what entity is actually responsible for its upkeep. In addition to tracing the history of the Cultural Trail and looking at the issue of trail maintenance, another member of our team is analyzing the link between the multiple uses of the trail and economic growth for the city. Our primary objective in this research is to document and understand the implications of this new model of philanthropic development by using downtown Indianapolis as our study site.

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